

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 14-17—HB 5329

Public Health Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFINITION OF NATURAL FOOD

SUMMARY: By law, food must meet certain criteria to be advertised, distributed, or sold as “natural.” Specifically, the food must not have been (1) treated with preservatives, antibiotics, synthetic additives, or artificial flavoring or coloring or (2) processed in a way that makes it significantly less nutritious. A 2013 law (PA 13-183) also excluded genetically engineered foods from the definition of natural food.

This act delays when that provision takes effect, until the consumer protection (DCP) commissioner recognizes the events that trigger the law’s labeling requirement for genetically engineered food (see BACKGROUND). Under the act, until those requirements are met, foods may be advertised, distributed, or sold as “natural” even if they are genetically engineered, as long as they otherwise qualify as natural.

The act also specifies that this provision only applies to food for humans. Thus, it allows genetically engineered food for animals to be advertised, distributed, or sold as natural even after the labeling requirement takes effect, as long as the food meets existing law’s other requirements for natural food.

By law, foods advertised, distributed, or sold as “natural” without meeting the definition of that term are deemed misbranded. A person who misbrands food or sells misbranded food in Connecticut may be subject to criminal penalties. In addition, DCP has the authority to place an embargo on and, in some circumstances, seize misbranded food.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

BACKGROUND

Labeling Genetically Engineered Foods

Under PA 13-183, the labeling requirement for certain genetically engineered food goes into effect on the October 1 following the DCP commissioner’s recognition of the following:

1. four other states, including one bordering Connecticut, have enacted a mandatory labeling law for genetically engineered foods that is consistent with the act’s labeling requirement and
2. the total population of these states located in the northeast region of the country exceeds 20 million, based on 2010 census figures. The northeast region includes the other New England states, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

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